**JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE WANTS VACCINATION ROLLOUT PLAN FROM JUSTICE SECTOR**

The Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Service yesterday was briefed by the Department of Justice and Correctional Services on processes to be followed after the arrest and prosecution of people involved in the acts of violence that took place recently.

The Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Mr Ronald Lamola, said the recent eruptions of violence and looting in South Africa are an unprecedented assault on the country’s constitutional democracy, the social contract and the rule of law.

“Our analysis reveals that the unrest and incidences of violence we witnessed in the past week were occasioned by a confluence of issues. The violent acts of burning of national key installations, disruptions of economic activities, the blockage of national roads leading to disruptions of key supplies such as food, medicine, electricity, telecommunications and so forth with dire consequences for the thousands of people”, he said.

Minister Lamola said some of it fell squarely within the parameters of the protection of constitutional democracy against the Terrorist and Related Activities Act 333 of 2004. “This Act of Parliament is one of the critical pieces of legislation designed for the protection of our constitutional democracy. Law enforcement agencies have to investigate all those who violated the spirit of the constitution and all legislation that could have been affected by this violent act we witnessed in our country”, he said.

Committee members raised concerns about the recent unrest that took place and indicated that is the reason why this meeting was prioritised. The committee was informed by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) that most of the unrest-related incidents were in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

The National Director of Public Prosecutions, Adv Shamila Batohi, told the committee that recent events highlight the importance of a truly independent NPA. “The NPA is clear about its mandate and takes instructions from no one. We follow the evidence and we proceed accordingly. Those responsible must be held accountable. We are collaborating very carefully with South African Police Service (Saps) to ensure that in respect of each of the categories, we have a very clear but different approach to how we deal with this. Together with Saps, we really have to be relentless in ensuring that our coordination is very clear and that we bring to book those most responsible for what has happened in our country” she said.

 The committee was also informed by the NPA that various case dockets have been opened by the Saps following the unrest. There are 197 case dockets for murder, 50 for attempted murder, 55 for arson, 234 for malicious injury to property, 598 for possession of suspected stolen property, three inquests in Gauteng, 664 other cases and four high-profile cases which are in court.

The committee was also informed that some of the correctional services centres in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng are experiencing several challenges as a result of the impact of the remand detainees admitted from the recent unrests. The department has experienced shortages of uniforms in both provinces. However, the department is making efforts to supply them.

Other areas that are affected include bed space as a result of overcrowding, nutrition as a result of food rationing and delays in receiving bread. The department has also raised the issue of medical costs which will increase due to the state being responsible for the medical costs of all remanded detainees and a need for more personal protective equipment of admitted remand detainees.

The Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Correctional Services, Mr Richard Dyantyi, said the department should appear before Parliament before approaching National Treasury on reprioritising their budget. “On this issue of reprioritisation of the correctional services current budget, which I support, maybe the first step before they go to Treasury will be to come before the sub-committee on correctional services because we need to know what they are reprioritising”, he said.

Mr Dyantyi also requested the department to give a comprehensive report on the vaccination programme of the justice and correctional services sector with clear timelines.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Bulelani Magwanishe said the committee will be calling the department, NPA and Legal Aid to get a detailed programme of vaccinations. “It is very important for the department, NPA and Legal Aid to be on top of the vaccination programme. It will be very difficult to have functioning courts which ensure that justice is meted out properly” he said.

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